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THE ARTISTIC CAREER OF CORKY

P.G. WODEHOUSE

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS

THE ARTISTIC CAREER OF CORKY

by

PG Wodehouse

1916

Lyons Head Publishing

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Lyons Head Publishing

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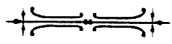
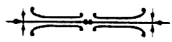


"**The Artistic Career of Corky**" is a short story by P. G. Wodehouse, and features the young gentleman Bertie Wooster and his valet Jeeves. The story was published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in the United States in February 1916, and in *The Strand Magazine* in the United Kingdom in June 1916.

The story takes place in New York. where the artist Corky, a friend of Bertie's, wants to get approval from his uncle to marry his fiancée Muriel. To help Corky, Jeeves proposes a plan that involves books about American birds.

"THE VERY FIRST WORDS I SPOKE WERE, 'CORKY, HOW ABOUT YOUR UNCLE?'"



The Artistic Career of Corky

You will notice, as you flit through these reminiscences of mine, that from time to time the scene of action is laid in and around the city of New York; and it is just possible that this may occasion the puzzled look and the start of surprise. 'What,' it is possible that you may ask yourselves, 'is Bertram doing so far from his beloved native land?'

Well, it's a fairly longish story; but, reefing it down a bit and turning it for the nonce into a two-reeler, what happened was that my Aunt Agatha on one occasion sent me over to America to try to stop young Gussie, my cousin, marrying a girl on the vaudeville stage, and I got the whole thing so mixed up that I decided it would be a sound scheme to stop on in New York for a bit instead of going back and having long, cosy chats with her about the affair.

So I sent Jeeves out to find a decent flat, and settled down for a spell of exile.

I'm bound to say New York's a most sprightly place to be exiled in. Everybody was awfully good to me, and there seemed to be plenty of things going on so, take it for all in all, I didn't undergo any frightful hardships. Blokes introduced me to other blokes, and so on and so forth, and it wasn't long before I knew squads of the right sort, some who rolled in the stuff in houses up by the Park, and others who lived with the gas turned down mostly around Washington Square—artists and writers and so forth. Brainy coves.

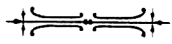
Corky, the bird I am about to treat of, was one of the artists. A portrait-painter, he called himself, but as a matter of fact his score up to date had been nil. You see, the catch about portrait-painting—I've looked into the thing a bit—is that you can't start painting portraits till people come along and ask you to, and they won't come and ask you to until you've painted a lot first. This makes it kind of difficult, not to say tough, for the ambitious youngster.

Corky managed to get along by drawing an occasional picture for the comic papers—he had rather a gift for funny stuff when he got a good idea—and doing bedsteads and chairs

and things for the advertisements. His principal source of income, however, was derived from biting the ear of a rich uncle—one Alexander Worple, who was in the jute business. I'm a bit foggy as to what jute is, but it's apparently something the populace is pretty keen on, for Mr Worple had made quite an indecently large stack out of it.

Now, a great many fellows think that having a rich uncle is a pretty soft snap; but, according to Corky, such is not the case. Corky's uncle was a robust sort of cove, who looked like living for ever. He was fifty-one, and it seemed as if he might go to par. It was not this, however, that distressed poor Corky, for he was not bigoted and had no objection to the man going on living. What Corky kicked at was the way the above Worple used to harry him.

Corky's uncle, you see, didn't want him to be an artist. He didn't think he had any talent in that direction. He was always urging him to chuck Art and go into the jute business and start at the bottom and work his way up. And what Corky said was that, while he didn't know what they did at the bottom of a jute business, instinct told him that it was something too beastly for words. Corky, moreover, believed in his future as an artist. Some day, he said, he was going to make a hit.



Meanwhile, by using the utmost tact and persuasiveness, he was inducing his uncle to cough up very grudgingly a small quarterly allowance.

He wouldn't have got this if his uncle hadn't had a hobby. Mr Worple was peculiar in this respect. As a rule, from what I've observed, the American captain of industry doesn't do anything out of business hours. When he has put the cat out and locked up the office for the night, he just relapses into a state of coma from which he emerges only to start being a captain of industry again. But Mr Worple in his spare time was what is known as an ornithologist. He had written a book called *American Birds*, and was writing another, to be called *More American Birds*. When he had finished that, the presumption was that he would begin a third, and keep on till the supply of American birds gave out. Corky used to go to him about once every three months and let him talk about American birds. Apparently you could do what you liked with old Worple if you gave him his head first on his pet subject, so these little chats used to make Corky's allowance all right for the time being. But it was pretty rotten for the poor chap. There was the frightful suspense, you see, and, apart from that, birds, except when

broiled and in the society of a cold bottle, bored him stiff.

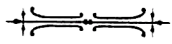
To complete the character-study of Mr Worple, he was a man of extremely uncertain temper, and his general tendency was to think that Corky was a poor chump and that whatever step he took in any direction on his own account was just another proof of his innate idiocy. I should imagine Jeeves feels very much the same about me.

So when Corky trickled into my apartment one afternoon, shooing a girl in front of him, and said, 'Bertie, I want you to meet my fiancée, Miss Singer,' the aspect of the matter which hit me first was precisely the one which he had come to consult me about. The very first words I spoke were, 'Corky, how about your uncle?'

The poor chap gave one of those mirthless laughs. He was looking anxious and worried, like a man who has done the murder all right but can't think what the deuce to do with the body.

'We're so scared, Mr Wooster,' said the girl. 'We were hoping that you might suggest a way of breaking it to him.'

Muriel Singer was one of those very quiet, appealing girls who have a way of looking at



you with their big eyes as if they thought you were the greatest thing on earth and wondered that you hadn't got on to it yet yourself. She sat there in a sort of shrinking way, looking at me as if she were saying to herself, 'Oh, I do hope this great strong man isn't going to hurt me.' She gave a fellow a protective kind of feeling, made him want to stroke her hand and say, 'There, there, little one!' or words to that effect. She made me feel that there was nothing I wouldn't do for her. She was rather like one of those innocent-tasting American drinks which creep imperceptibly into your system so that, before you know what you're doing, you're starting out to reform the world by force if necessary and pausing on your way to tell the large man in the corner that, if he looks at you like that, you will knock his head off. What I mean is, she made me feel alert and dashing, like a knight-errant or something of that kind. I felt that I was with her in this thing to the limit.

'I don't see why your uncle shouldn't be most awfully bucked,' I said to Corky. 'He will think Miss Singer the ideal wife for you.'

Corky declined to cheer up.

'You don't know him. Even if he did like Muriel, he wouldn't admit it. That's the sort of pig-headed ass he is. It would be a matter of

principle with him to kick. All he would consider would be that I had gone and taken an important step without asking his advice, and he would raise Cain automatically. He's always done it.'

I strained the old bean to meet this emergency.

'You want to work it so that he makes Miss Singer's acquaintance without knowing that you know her. Then you come along—'

'But how can I work it that way?'

I saw his point. That was the catch.

'There's only one thing to do,' I said.

'What's that?'

'Leave it to Jeeves.'

And I rang the bell.

'Sir?' said Jeeves, kind of manifesting himself. One of the rummy things about Jeeves is that, unless you watch like a hawk, you very seldom see him come into a room. He's like one of those weird birds in India who dissolve themselves into thin air and nip through space in a sort of disembodied way and assemble the parts again just where they want them. I've got a cousin who's what they call a Theosophist,

and he says he's often nearly worked the thing himself, but couldn't quite bring it off, probably owing to having fed in his boyhood on the flesh of animals slain in anger and pie.

The moment I saw the man standing there, registering respectful attention, a weight seemed to roll off my mind. I felt like a lost child who spots his father in the offing.

'Jeeves,' I said, 'we want your advice.'

'Very good, sir.'

I boiled down Corky's painful case into a few well-chosen words.

'So you see what it amounts to, Jeeves. We want you to suggest some way by which Mr Worple can make Miss Singer's acquaintance without getting on to the fact that Mr Corcoran already knows her. Understand?'

'Perfectly, sir.'

'Well, try to think of something.'

'I have thought of something already, sir.'

'You have!'

'The scheme I would suggest cannot fail of success, but it has what may seem to you a

drawback, sir, in that it requires a certain financial outlay.'

'He means,' I translated to Corky, 'that he has got a pippin of an idea, but it's going to cost a bit.'

Naturally the poor chap's face dropped, for this seemed to dish the whole thing. But I was still under the influence of the girl's melting gaze, and I saw that this was where I started in as the knight-errant.

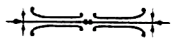
'You can count on me for all that sort of thing, Corky,' I said. 'Only too glad. Carry on, Jeeves.'

'I would suggest, sir, that Mr Corcoran take advantage of Mr Worple's attachment to ornithology.'

'How on earth did you know that he was fond of birds?'

'It is the way these New York apartments are constructed, sir. Quite unlike our London houses. The partitions between the rooms are of the flimsiest nature. With no wish to overhear, I have sometimes heard Mr Corcoran expressing himself with a generous strength on the subject I have mentioned.'

'Oh! Well?'

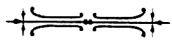


'Why should not the young lady write a small volume, to be entitled—let us say—*The Children's Book of American Birds* and dedicate it to Mr Worple? A limited edition could be published at your expense, sir, and a great deal of the book would, of course, be given over to eulogistic remarks concerning Mr Worple's own larger treatise on the same subject. I should recommend the dispatching of a presentation copy to Mr Worple, immediately on publication, accompanied by a letter in which the young lady asks to be allowed to make the acquaintance of one to whom she owes so much. This would, I fancy, produce the desired result, but as I say, the expense involved would be considerable.'

I felt like the proprietor of a performing dog on the vaudeville stage when the tyke has just pulled off his trick without a hitch. I had betted on Jeeves all along, and I had known that he wouldn't let me down. It beats me sometimes why a man with his genius is satisfied to hang around pressing my clothes and what-not. If I had half Jeeves's brain I should have a stab at being Prime Minister or something.

'Jeeves,' I said, 'that is absolutely ripping! One of your very best efforts.'

'Thank you, sir.'



The girl made an objection.

'But I'm sure I couldn't write a book about anything. I can't even write good letters.'

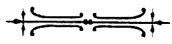
'Muriel's talents,' said Corky, with a little cough, 'lie more in the direction of the drama, Bertie. I didn't mention it before, but one of our reasons for being a trifle nervous as to how Uncle Alexander will receive the news is that Muriel is in the chorus of that show *Choose your Exit* at the Manhattan. It's absurdly unreasonable, but we both feel that that fact might increase Uncle Alexander's natural tendency to kick like a steer.'

I saw what he meant. I don't know why it is—one of these psychology sharps could explain it, I suppose—but uncles and aunts, as a class, are always dead against the drama, legitimate or otherwise. They don't seem able to stick it at any price.

But Jeeves had a solution, of course.

'I fancy it would be a simple matter, sir, to find some impecunious author who would be glad to do the actual composition of the volume for a small fee. It is only necessary that the young lady's name should appear on the title page.'

'That's true,' said Corky. 'Sam Patterson would do it for a hundred dollars. He writes a



novelette, three short stories, and ten thousand words of a serial for one of the all-fiction magazines under different names every month. A little thing like this would be nothing to him. I'll get after him right away.'

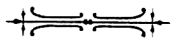
'Fine!'

'Will that be all, sir?' said Jeeves. 'Very good, sir. Thank you, sir.'

I always used to think that publishers had to be devilish intelligent fellows, loaded down with the grey matter; but I've got their number now. All a publisher has to do is to write cheques at intervals, while a lot of deserving and industrious chappies rally round and do the real work. I know, because I've been one myself. I simply sat tight in the old flat with a fountain-pen, and in due season a topping, shiny book came along.

I happened to be down at Corky's place when the first copies of *The Children's Book of American Birds* bobbed up. Muriel Singer was there, and we were talking of things in general when there was a bang at the door and the parcel was delivered.

It was certainly some book. It had a red cover with a fowl of some species on it, and underneath the girl's name in gold letters. I opened a copy at random.



'Often of a spring morning,' it said at the top of page twenty-one, 'as you wander through the fields, you will hear the sweet-toned, carelessly flowing warble of the purple finch linnet. When you are older you must read all about him in Mr Alexander Worple's wonderful book, *American Birds*.'

You see. A boost for the uncle right away. And only a few pages later there he was in the limelight again in connexion with the yellow-billed cuckoo. It was great stuff. The more I read, the more I admired the chap who had written it and Jeeves's genius in putting us on to the wheeze. I didn't see how the uncle could fail to drop. You can't call a chap the world's greatest authority on the yellow-billed cuckoo without rousing a certain disposition towards chumminess in him.

'It's a cert!' I said.

'An absolute cinch!' said Corky.

And a day or two later he meandered up the Avenue to my flat to tell me that all was well. The uncle had written Muriel a letter so dripping with the milk of human kindness that if he hadn't known Mr Worple's handwriting Corky would have refused to believe him the author of it. Any time it suited Miss Singer to

call, said the uncle, he would be delighted to make her acquaintance.

Shortly after this I had to go out of town. Divers sound sportsmen had invited me to pay visits to their country places, and it wasn't for several months that I settled down in the city again. I had been wondering a lot, of course, about Corky, whether it all turned out right, and so forth, and my first evening in New York, happening to pop into a quiet sort of little restaurant which I go to when I don't feel inclined for the bright lights, I found Muriel Singer there, sitting by herself at a table near the door. Corky, I took it, was out telephoning. I went up and passed the time of day.

'Well, well, well, what?' I said.

'Why, Mr Wooster! How do you do?'

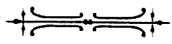
'Corky around?'

'I beg your pardon?'

'You're waiting for Corky, aren't you?'

'Oh, I didn't understand. No, I'm not waiting for him.'

It seemed to me that there was a sort of something in her voice, a kind of thingummy, you know.



'I say, you haven't had a row with Corky, have you?'

'A row?'

'A spat, don't you know—little misunderstanding—faults on both sides—er—and all that sort of thing.'

'Why, whatever makes you think that?'

'Oh, well, as it were, what? What I mean is—I thought you usually dined with him before you went to the theatre.'

'I've left the stage now.'

Suddenly the whole thing dawned on me. I had forgotten what a long time I had been away.

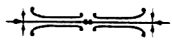
'Why, of course, I see now! You're married!'

'Yes.'

'How perfectly topping! I wish you all kinds of happiness.'

'Thank you so much. Oh, Alexander,' she said, looking past me, 'this is a friend of mine—Mr Wooster.'

I spun round. A bloke with a lot of stiff grey hair and a red sort of healthy face was



standing there. Rather a formidable Johnnie, he looked, though peaceful at the moment.

'I want you to meet my husband, Mr Wooster. Mr Wooster is a friend of Bruce's, Alexander.'

The old boy grasped my hand warmly, and that was all that kept me from hitting the floor in a heap. The place was rocking. Absolutely.

'So you know my nephew, Mr Wooster?' I heard him say. 'I wish you would try to knock a little sense into him and make him quit this playing at painting. But I have an idea that he is steadying down. I noticed it first that night he came to dinner with us, my dear, to be introduced to you. He seemed altogether quieter and more serious. Something seemed to have sobered him. Perhaps you will give us the pleasure of your company at dinner tonight, Mr Wooster? Or have you dined?'

I said I had. What I needed then was air, not dinner. I felt that I wanted to get into the open and think this thing out.

When I reached my flat I heard Jeeves moving about in his lair. I called him.

'Jeeves,' I said, 'now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party. A stiff b-and-s first of all, and then I've a bit of news for you.'

He came back with a tray and a long glass.

'Better have one yourself, Jeeves. You'll need it.'

'Later on, perhaps, thank you, sir.'

'All right. Please yourself. But you're going to get a shock. You remember my friend, Mr Corcoran?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And the girl who was to slide gracefully into his uncle's esteem by writing the book on birds?'

'Perfectly, sir.'

'Well, she's slid. She's married the uncle.'

He took it without blinking. You can't rattle Jeeves.

'That was always a development to be feared, sir.'

'You don't mean to tell me that you were expecting it?'

'It crossed my mind as a possibility.'

'Did it, by Jove! Well, I think you might have warned us!'

'I hardly liked to take the liberty, sir.'

Of course, as I saw after I had had a bite to eat and was in a calmer frame of mind, what had happened wasn't my fault, if you came down to it. I couldn't be expected to foresee that the scheme, in itself a cracker-jack, would skid into the ditch as it had done; but all the same I'm bound to admit that I didn't relish the idea of meeting Corky again until time, the great healer, had been able to get in a bit of soothing work. I cut Washington Square out absolutely for the next few months. I gave it the complete miss-in-baulk. And then, just when I was beginning to think I might safely pop down in that direction and gather up the dropped threads, so to speak, time, instead of working the healing wheeze, went and pulled the most awful bone and put the lid on it. Opening the paper one morning, I read that Mrs Alexander Worple had presented her husband with a son and heir.

I was so dashed sorry for poor old Corky that I hadn't the heart to touch my breakfast. I was bowled over. Absolutely. It was the limit.

I hardly knew what to do. I wanted, of course, to rush down to Washington Square and grip the poor blighter silently by the hand; and then, thinking it over, I hadn't the nerve.

Absent treatment seemed the touch. I gave it him in waves.

But after a month or so I began to hesitate again. It struck me that it was playing it a bit low-down on the poor chap, avoiding him like this just when he probably wanted his pals to surge round him most. I pictured him sitting in his lonely studio with no company but his bitter thoughts, and the pathos of it got me to such an extent that I bounded straight into a taxi and told the driver to go all out for the studio.

I rushed in, and there was Corky, hunched up at the easel, painting away, while on the model throne sat a severe-looking female of middle age, holding a baby.

A fellow has to be ready for that sort of thing.

'Oh, ah!' I said, and started to back out.

Corky looked over his shoulder.

'Hallo, Bertie. Don't go. We're just finishing for the day. That will be all this afternoon,' he said to the nurse, who got up with the baby and decanted it into a perambulator which was standing in the fairway.

'At the same hour tomorrow, Mr Corcoran?'

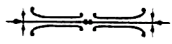
'Yes, please.'

'Good afternoon.'

'Good afternoon.'

Corky stood there, looking at the door, and then he turned to me and began to get it off his chest. Fortunately, he seemed to take it for granted that I knew all about what had happened, so it wasn't as awkward as it might have been.

'It's my uncle's idea,' he said. 'Muriel doesn't know about it yet. The portrait's to be a surprise for her on her birthday. The nurse takes the kid out ostensibly to get a breather, and they beat it down here. If you want an instance of the irony of fate, Bertie, get acquainted with this. Here's the first commission I have ever had to paint a portrait, and the sitter is that human poached egg that has butted in and bounced me out of my inheritance. Can you beat it! I call it rubbing the thing in to expect me to spend my afternoons gazing into the ugly face of a little brat who to all intents and purposes has hit me behind the ear with a black-jack and swiped all I possess. I can't refuse to paint the portrait, because if I did my uncle would stop my allowance; yet every time I look up and catch that kid's vacant eye, I suffer agonies. I tell you, Bertie, sometimes when he gives me a patronizing glance and then turns away and is



sick, as if it revolted him to look at me, I come within an ace of occupying the entire front page of the evening papers as the latest murder sensation. There are moments when I can almost see the headlines: "Promising Young Artist Beans Baby With Axe."'

I patted his shoulder silently. My sympathy for the poor old scout was too deep for words.

I kept away from the studio for some time after that, because it didn't seem right to me to intrude on the poor chappie's sorrow. Besides, I'm bound to say that nurse intimidated me. She reminded me so infernally of Aunt Agatha. She was the same gimlet-eyed type.

But one afternoon Corky called me on the phone.

'Bertie!'

'Hallo?'

'Are you doing anything this afternoon?'

'Nothing special.'

'You couldn't come down here, could you?'

'What's the trouble? Anything up?'

'I've finished the portrait.'

'Good boy! Stout work!'

'Yes.' His voice sounded rather doubtful. 'The fact is, Bertie, it doesn't look quite right to me. There's something about it—My uncle's coming in half an hour to inspect it, and—I don't know why it is, but I kind of feel I'd like your moral support!'

I began to see that I was letting myself in for something. The sympathetic cooperation of Jeeves seemed to me to be indicated.

'You think he'll cut up rough?'

'He may.'

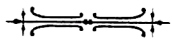
I threw my mind back to the red-faced chappie I had met at the restaurant, and tried to picture him cutting up rough. It was only too easy. I spoke to Corky firmly on the telephone.

'I'll come,' I said.

'Good!'

'But only if I may bring Jeeves.'

'Why Jeeves? What's Jeeves got to do with it? Who wants Jeeves? Jeeves is the fool who suggested the scheme that has led—'



'Listen, Corky, old top! If you think I am going to face that uncle of yours without Jeeves's support, you're mistaken. I'd sooner go into a den of wild beasts and bite a lion on the back of the neck.'

'Oh, all right,' said Corky. Not cordially, but he said it; so I rang for Jeeves, and explained the situation.

'Very good, sir,' said Jeeves.

We found Corky near the door, looking at the picture with one hand up in a defensive sort of way, as if he thought it might swing on him.

'Stand right where you are, Bertie,' he said, without moving. 'Now, tell me honestly, how does it strike you?'

The light from the big window fell right on the picture. I took a good look at it. Then I shifted a bit nearer and took another look. Then I went back to where I had been at first, because it hadn't seemed quite so bad from there.

'Well?' said Corky anxiously.

I hesitated a bit.

'Of course, old man, I only saw the kid once, and then only for a moment, but—but it *was* an ugly sort of kid, wasn't it, if I remember rightly?'

'As ugly as that?'

I looked again, and honesty compelled me to be frank.

'I don't see how it could have been, old chap.'

Poor old Corky ran his fingers through his hair in a temperamental sort of way. He groaned.

'You're quite right, Bertie. Something's gone wrong with the darned thing. My private impression is that, without knowing it, I've worked that stunt that Sargent used to pull—painting the soul of the sitter. I've got through the mere outward appearance, and have put the child's soul on canvas.'

'But could a child of that age have a soul like that? I don't see how he could have managed it in the time. What do you think, Jeeves?'

'I doubt it, sir.'

'It—it sort of leers at you, doesn't it?'

'You've noticed that, too?' said Corky.

'I don't see how one could help noticing.'

'All I tried to do was to give the little brute a cheerful expression. But, as it has worked out, he looks positively dissipated.'

'Just what I was going to suggest, old man. He looks as if he were in the middle of a colossal spree, and enjoying every minute of it. Don't you think so, Jeeves?'

'He has a decidedly inebriated air, sir.'

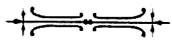
Corky was starting to say something, when the door opened and the uncle came in.

For about three seconds all was joy, jollity and goodwill. The old boy shook hands with me, slapped Corky on the back, said he didn't think he had ever seen such a fine day, and whacked his leg with his stick. Jeeves had projected himself into the background, and he didn't notice him.

'Well, Bruce, my boy; so the portrait is really finished, is it—really finished? Well, bring it out. Let's have a look at it. This will be a wonderful surprise for your aunt. Where is it? Let's—'

And then he got it—suddenly, when he wasn't set for the punch; and he rocked back on his heels.

'Oosh!' he exclaimed. And for perhaps a minute there was one of the scaliest silences I've ever run up against.

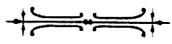


'Is this a practical joke?' he said at last, in a way that set about sixteen draughts cutting through the room at once.

I thought it was up to me to rally round old Corky.

'You want to stand a bit farther away from it,' I said.

'You're perfectly right!' he snorted. 'I do! I want to stand so far away from it that I can't see the thing with a telescope!' He turned on Corky like an untamed tiger of the jungle who has just located a chunk of meat. 'And this—this—is what you have been wasting your time and my money for all these years! A painter! I wouldn't let you paint a house of mine. I gave you this commission, thinking that you were a competent worker, and this—this—this extract from a comic supplement is the result!' He swung towards the door, lashing his tail and growling to himself. 'This ends it. If you wish to continue this foolery of pretending to be an artist because you want an excuse for idleness, please yourself. But let me tell you this. Unless you report at my office on Monday morning, prepared to abandon all this idiocy and start in at the bottom of the business to work your way up, as you should have done half a dozen years ago, not another cent—not another cent—not another—Boosh!'



Then the door closed and he was no longer with us. And I crawled out of the bomb-proof shelter.

'Corky, old top!' I whispered faintly.

Corky was standing staring at the picture. His face was set. There was a hunted look in his eye.

'Well, that finishes it!' he muttered brokenly.

'What are you going to do?'

'Do? What can I do? I can't stick on here if he cuts off supplies. You heard what he said. I shall have to go to the office on Monday.'

I couldn't think of a thing to say. I knew exactly how he felt about the office. I don't know when I've been so infernally uncomfortable. It was like hanging round trying to make conversation to a pal who's just been sentenced to twenty years in quod.

And then a soothing voice broke the silence.

'If I might make a suggestion, sir!'

It was Jeeves. He had slid from the shadows and was gazing gravely at the picture. Upon my word, I can't give you a better idea of the shattering effect of Corky's Uncle Alexander when in action than by saying that he had

absolutely made me forget for the moment that Jeeves was there.

'I wonder if I have ever happened to mention to you, sir, a Mr Digby Thistleton, with whom I was once in service? Perhaps you have met him? He was a financier. He is now Lord Bridgworth. It was a favourite saying of his that there is always a way. The first time I heard him use the expression was after the failure of a patent depilatory which he promoted.'

'Jeeves,' I said, 'what on earth are you talking about?'

'I mentioned Mr Thistleton, sir, because his was in some respects a parallel case to the present one. His depilatory failed, but he did not despair. He put it on the market again under the name of Hair-o, guaranteed to produce a full crop of hair in a few months. It was advertised, if you remember, sir, by a humorous picture of a billiard ball, before and after taking, and made such a substantial fortune that Mr Thistleton was soon afterwards elevated to the peerage for services to his Party. It seems to me that, if Mr Corcoran looks into the matter, he will find, like Mr Thistleton, that there is always a way. Mr Worple himself suggested the solution of the difficulty. In the heat of the moment he

compared the portrait to an extract from a coloured comic supplement. I consider the suggestion a very valuable one, sir. Mr Corcoran's portrait may not have pleased Mr Worple as a likeness of his only child, but I have no doubt that editors would gladly consider it as a foundation for a series of humorous drawings. If Mr Corcoran will allow me to make the suggestion, his talent has always been for the humorous. There is something about this picture—something bold and vigorous, which arrests the attention. I feel sure it would be highly popular.'

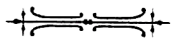
Corky was glaring at the picture, and making a sort of dry, sucking noise with his mouth. He seemed completely overwrought.

And then suddenly he began to laugh in a wild way.

'Corky, old man!' I said, massaging him tenderly. I feared the poor blighter was hysterical.

He began to stagger about all over the floor.

'He's right! The man's absolutely right! Jeeves, you're a life-saver. You've hit on the greatest idea of the age. Report at the office on Monday! Start at the bottom of the business! I'll buy the business if I feel like it. I know the man who runs the comic section of the



Sunday Star. He'll eat this thing. He was telling me only the other day how hard it was to get a good new series. He'll give me anything I ask for a real winner like this. I've got a gold mine. Where's my hat? I've got an income for life! Where's that confounded hat? Lend me a five, Bertie. I want to take a taxi down to Park Row!'

Jeeves smiled paternally. Or, rather, he had a kind of paternal muscular spasm about the mouth, which is the nearest he ever gets to smiling.

'If I might make the suggestion, Mr Corcoran —for a title of the series which you have in mind—"The Adventures of Baby Blobbs".'

Corky and I looked at the picture, then at each other in an awed way. Jeeves was right. There could be no other title.

'Jeeves,' I said. It was a few weeks later, and I had just finished looking at the comic section of the *Sunday Star*. 'I'm an optimist. I always have been. The older I get, the more I agree with Shakespeare and those poet Johnnies about it always being darkest before the dawn and there's a silver lining and what you lose on the swings you make up on the roundabouts. Look at Mr Corcoran, for instance. There was a fellow, one would have

said, clear up to the eyebrows in the soup. To all appearances he had got it right in the neck. Yet look at him now. Have you seen these pictures?'

'I took the liberty of glancing at them before bringing them to you, sir. Extremely diverting.'

'They have made a big hit, you know.'

'I anticipated it, sir.'

I leaned back against the pillows.

'You know, Jeeves, you're a genius. You ought to be drawing a commission on these things.'

'I have nothing to complain of in that respect, sir. Mr Corcoran has been most generous. I am putting out the brown suit, sir.'

'No, I think I'll wear the blue with the faint red stripe.'

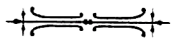
'Not the blue with the faint red stripe, sir.'

'But I rather fancy myself in it.'

'Not the blue with the faint red stripe, sir.'

'Oh, all right, have it your own way.'

'Very good, sir. Thank you, sir.'



The End

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